

All Students Can Learn

By Governor Ernie Fletcher

Much has been written in recent years about the academic achievement gap between non-minority and minority students in the United States. There are countless studies, commissions and task forces charged with isolating and eliminating the gap. All of them, I am sure, are well intentioned. But as a physician, government official, concerned citizen and parent, I approach education from this premise: All children can learn.

I believe that rigorous teaching to high standards and community and parental involvement are the keys to a successful education career for our students. Our schools must approach each child as an educational opportunity and our parents must resign themselves, as Dr. Patricia Kusimo so aptly put it, "as the CEO of their children's education."

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of a high-performing elementary school. Indeed, the elementary school is generally the indicator of the community's economic and cultural health, as well as its future. For



a community to build upon its foundation and continually move forward, all children must prosper mentally, physically and spiritually.

Over the years Kentucky has made great strides reforming our education system and placing measurable value on student achievement. This month's newsletter serves to outline and emphasize what we can do to ensure the success of all students throughout the commonwealth.

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A Consensus of Concern

By Troy Body, Executive Director, Governor's Office of Minority Empowerment

Prior to joining the Fletcher administration, I worked in West Virginia as the commissioner for the West Virginia Division of Culture and History. While minority student achievement was not one of the duties listed in my job description, I did have the opportunity to coordinate and serve as the governor's liaison on the Governor's Minority Students Strategies Council.

The council was constructed for the singular mission of finding solutions to the state's academic achievement gap between minority and non-minority students. We focused solely on research and best practices. We also learned more than we could have imagined. The research and ideas keep flowing, but only one thing holds certain: students can learn.

Time and again, rigorous teaching to high standards and community and parental support are the proven silver bullets to



this issue. Educating the public to the role they must play is the primary purpose of this issue of our newsletter. It is important for parents and guardians to know that they are empowered and what they do matters, if their child is to succeed in school.

The competition within the state, nation and around the globe is fierce. Our students

will compete for professional positions against students from Japan, South Africa, Brazil and everywhere else in the world. They must be ready and we all must help.

Most all of the issues pertaining to minority students in regard to student achievement are similar to issues affecting low socio-economic students of all races. Income matters. But income, or the lack thereof, is not insurmountable if the community creates a consensus of concern and works together to support their local learning institution.

The local elementary school is the single most important institution in your community. We must engage, encourage and strengthen it as if the life of our community depended on it. It does.

CEO Parents and Guardians

Dr. Patricia Kusimo, Chief Executive Officer
West Virginia Center for Professional Development

If you're a parent or guardian of a school-aged child, I've got a question for you: How involved are you in your child's education? No, I don't want to know if you attend PTA meetings or chaperone school parties and other extra-curricula activities. I want to know two things: Do you have a vision of what you want your child to achieve by age 21 or 22? What's your plan for maximizing the chances of transforming that vision into reality?

In my experience as an educator and researcher, I encounter well-intentioned parents and guardians who are frustrated or embarrassed about their child's academic progress. These parents and guardians are often college graduates who have "good" jobs or own a business. However, their lack of knowledge about the educational process lessens their ability to successfully navigate their child through the school system.

In the 21st century, five of the greatest schooling challenges that confront parents and guardians are: recognizing the need to have a vision; recognizing the need to have an "achievement blueprint" for their child; becoming deeply informed about the various academic activities and programs within their child's school and community; understanding the short and long term consequences of a



child being included or excluded from an academic program or class; and marshalling the courage and information to challenge school teacher, and counselor decisions that do not support their vision and blueprint.

Effective 21st century parents and guardians understand the schooling process and its nuances. These parents and guardians expect to be and are the Chief Executive Officers (CEO) of their child's educational process. These parents and guardians know how to use school and community resources to support their vision for their child. They recognize and respect the roles educators and others play in their child's life, but as the parent or guardian, they control their child's educational progress and placements. As the CEO of their child's education, they advocate to advance their child's

education, much as a CEO of a company would do in order to grow a business. In fact, their "business" is the education of their child.

As CEO of their child's educational process they have a clear vision of the results they want their child to achieve daily, weekly and throughout the year. CEO parents and guardians establish standards for their child's academic performance and behavior and monitor their child's adherence to those standards. Based on the feedback they receive, they make the appropriate adjustments. Sometimes there is a reward, i.e., a financial bonus or other good things the child enjoys; sometimes there is a punishment, i.e., downsizing of activities such as turning off the television, computers and cell phones, and reducing social activities and contact with negative influences.

These CEO parents and guardians don't just hope things will improve for their children, they create conditions that will likely improve the bottom line. They recognize that their child's future rest in their hands. CEO parents and guardians know that ignoring a problem in the short-term can result in negative consequences in the long term. Long-term results, not short-term popularity, are their highest priority.

I'd like to suggest that all parents and guardians begin to view themselves as CEOs of their child's educational process by taking the following steps:

1. Create and write a vision and educational blueprint for your child that has high expectations.
2. Frequently discuss the vision with your child. Ultimately, they must own it.
3. Learn about the educational opportunities offered by your child's school and community.
4. Identify and involve your child in any activity that will enhance his or her academic abilities or talents.
5. Tie the privilege of participating in purely social activities to consistently meeting academic standards.
6. Display good manners at home, school and in the faith community you and your child attend.
7. Eliminate communication gaps between yourself and your child's teachers, care givers, coaches and youth group leaders by creating communication channels.
8. Make a quality commitment to monitor and take action regarding your child's academic progress, behavior and moral development.
9. Set limits on the amount of time your child watches television, uses the Internet and talks on the cell phone.

Your actions will teach your child values that will stand the test of time, leave a legacy of love and learning and make you proud to be a CEO parent.

Commonwealth Institute for Parental Leadership

<http://www.cipl.org>

Parental Involvement Checklist: The Six Standards of Parental Involvement, Project Appleseed

<http://www.projectappleseed.org/ch-klst.html>

National Center for Family & Community Connections with Schools

<http://www.sedl.org/connections>

Center for Law & Education

<http://www.cleweb.org>

Parent Teacher Association

<http://www.pta.org>

Center for Social Organization of Schools

<http://www.csos.jhu.edu>

Student Preparation and College Access

By Mr. Sherron Jackson and Dr. Rana Johnson
Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education

An article by education writer Art Jester of the Lexington-Herald-Leader, Lexington, Kentucky noted that the University of Kentucky fared better than most flagship schools by continuing to provide access and financial aid for poor and minority students. Jester's comments were based on the findings of a study published by the Education Trust. Not receiving as much press is the ACT report of the progress experienced by Kentuckians on its college entrance exams between 1991 and 2006. Overall, the average increase in ACT test scores for



Dr. Rana Johnson

Mr. Sherron Jackson

Kentuckians has been glacial at best, increasing from 20.0 in 1991 to 20.6 in 2006.

To reach its ultimate goal, as identified by the Kentucky Postsecondary Education Improvement Act of 1997 (HB 1), the Public Agenda calls for

Kentucky to produce 791,000 bachelor's degree holders by year 2020 to reach the national average in educational attainment. This requires the number of bachelor's degree holders to double over the next 14 years.

By the numbers, the change in average scores of Kentuckians is keeping pace with the national average. However, minority students are not progressing at a rate that will assure them the level and quality of access to postsecondary education that will keep pace with other ethnic groups. Minority students

Fig. 1.0 What are the Numbers?

	African Amer.	Native Amer.	Whites	Mexican Amer.	Asian Amer.	KY Average	National Average
2006	17.1	19.4	20.9	19.5	22.3	20.6	21.1
2000	16.8	18.6	20.4	19.6	21.0	20.1	21.0
1995	17.0	17.8	20.3	18.6	21.0	20.1	20.8
1991	16.9	17.7	20.2	19.1	21.3	20.0	20.6
National Avg. by Race (2006)	17.1	18.8	22.0	18.6	22.3		

express interest in entering careers such as engineering but an alarming number do not complete advanced coursework in high school, taking only basic math and science classes. Studies report that minorities have significantly lower overall GPAs, are less likely to rank in the top quarter of their class and have significantly lower ACT scores than their caucasian counterparts. Generally, many minority students who aspire to careers in the Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) areas are not adequately prepared to enter the undergraduate programs from an academic standpoint.

What do the numbers mean and what can be done to improve student performance? Overall, all students have made some gains; African Americans have shown less progress than other ethnic groups. We are doing a better job of encouraging more students to take the ACT who in the past would not have considered college an option. For example, 2,248 African-American Kentuckians took the ACT in 2006, compared to 1,602 in 1991.

Students need guidance from teachers and counselors early on to help them plan for their future and select the right courses. The troubling reality is that aspirations and preparation for many are not aligned. The typical ninth-grader in Kentucky will assert that he or she desires to attend a postsecondary institution. However, in 1999 a total of 108,870 African-American Kentuckians and white students enrolled in Kentucky's public postsecondary education system; a total of 9,932 degree-seeking African American and white freshmen enrolled directly out of high school, and ultimately six years later, only 4,479 (45.1 percent) graduated with a bachelor's degree. Of the total 8,854 (8.1 percent) African-American Kentuckians that enrolled in 1999, a total of 832 transitioned into a postsecondary institution directly out of high school, and ultimately six years later, only 273 (32.8 percent) graduated with a bachelor's degree. Research confirms that there is a strong correlation between higher average ACT scores and better preparation for college.

ACT research has consistently shown that higher-level preparation in the core courses is directly related to higher achievement on the ACT Assessment and, thus, to success in college. Large differences between the scores of those with more core preparation and those with less core preparation are evident among all racial/ethnic groups and at all socioeconomic levels. More students have college-ready skills in English, math, reading and science this year than last. The percentage of students who met or exceeded ACT's College Readiness Benchmark score in reading increased by 2 percentage points compared to last year, while the percentage who met or exceeded the benchmark scores in English, math, and science each increased by 1 percentage point. College readiness has grown slowly but steadily in recent years in both math (up by 3% since 2002) and English (up by 2%). Despite the increases, the results suggest that the majority of ACT-tested graduates are still likely to struggle in first-year college math and science courses. When compared to other ethnic groups, African Americans will be confronted with the greatest challenge as their improvement on the ACT showed the least improvement.

What is the long term outlook? Postsecondary education, especially public postsecondary education, is considered the door of opportunity for future generations. Kentucky's low-income and minority students could be privy to this opportunity without

privilege, but with great promise, when provided the proper resources to succeed: quality teachers, a rigorous curriculum, and educational policies, goals, and objectives that support their achievements.

Often, the question raised is just how much more challenging should middle and high school be? Many believe that student instruction in today's school environment is not as challenging as it should be. But, it is not clear whether the problem encountered is social or academic. Opportunity clearly affects college access and student success, particularly for low-income and minority students. A deliberate plan of action to assure proper

student preparation is needed. Some helpful actions might be:

- Colleges and universities should have stronger developmental education testing and placement policies.
- School districts should provide challenging science and math courses which are aligned with college requirements beginning no later than middle school.
- School districts and parents should specifically encourage females and minorities to consider and plan for a broad range of careers, especially those in science and engineering.
- Colleges and universities should work with school districts to strengthen middle

school and high school math and science courses.

- Policymakers should fund and implement programs that foster student interest in and preparation for careers in STEM program areas.

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16 Year Ethnic Trends in ACT Averages of Kentucky High School Graduates *

African American

		English	Math	Reading	Science	Composite
	N	Avg	Avg	Avg	Avg	Avg
1991	1602	16.5	16.6	16.9	17.1	16.9
1992	1565	16.5	16.7	16.8	17.2	16.9
1993	1619	16.6	16.9	17.0	17.5	17.1
1994	1546	16.4	16.7	17.1	17.6	17.1
1995	1607	16.2	16.5	17.3	17.6	17.0
1996	1759	16.2	16.5	17.0	17.4	16.9
1997	1810	16.3	16.7	17.2	17.4	17.0
1998	1892	16.2	16.7	17.1	17.3	17.0
1999	1886	16.1	16.7	16.8	17.2	16.8
2000	1995	16.2	16.5	16.9	17.2	16.8
2001	2017	15.8	16.5	16.6	17.1	16.6
2002	2064	15.6	16.5	16.6	17.1	16.6
2003	2024	15.8	16.4	17.0	17.4	16.8
2004	2173	15.9	16.8	17.1	17.5	16.9
2005	2176	15.8	16.5	17.0	17.4	16.8
2006	2248	16.3	16.8	17.1	17.6	17.1

Native American

		English	Math	Reading	Science	Composite
	N	Avg	Avg	Avg	Avg	Avg
1991	169	17.1	16.9	17.5	18.5	17.7
1992	133	17.5	17.3	18.0	18.0	17.8
1993	137	17.2	16.9	18.3	18.0	17.8
1994	189	17.7	17.5	19.0	19.1	18.4
1995	173	17.1	17.3	18.0	18.3	17.8
1996	179	18.4	17.6	19.9	19.7	19.0
1997	148	16.5	17.1	18.2	18.3	17.7
1998	118	17.8	17.7	19.1	19.4	18.6
1999	84	17.9	17.7	19.0	18.8	18.5
2000	83	18.2	17.6	19.5	18.7	18.6
2001	95	16.3	17.2	17.5	18.3	17.5
2002	96	17.6	17.8	19.0	18.6	18.4
2003	100	18.8	18.6	20.2	20.0	19.5
2004	97	17.5	17.9	18.9	18.7	18.4
2005	110	19.2	18.8	20.1	20.1	19.7
2006	83	18.9	18.7	20.2	19.4	19.4

16 Year Ethnic Trends in ACT Averages of Kentucky High School Graduates *Continued*

Mexican American

		English	Math	Reading	Science	Composite
	N	Avg	Avg	Avg	Avg	Avg
1991	111	18.7	18.3	19.9	19.0	19.1
1992	150	18.2	18.2	19.4	18.7	18.8
1993	149	19.4	19.2	20.1	20.2	19.8
1994	141	19.0	18.8	19.9	19.7	19.5
1995	174	17.8	18.3	18.9	18.8	18.6
1996	231	18.4	18.5	19.2	19.3	18.9
1997	243	18.8	19.0	20.1	20.0	19.6
1998	200	19.5	19.4	20.3	20.1	20.0
1999	210	18.7	18.6	19.6	19.2	19.2
2000	202	18.8	19.3	19.8	19.9	19.6
2001	267	18.5	19.4	19.4	19.7	19.4
2002	221	18.2	18.9	19.7	19.0	19.1
2003	312	18.0	18.5	19.4	19.1	18.9
2004	307	18.1	18.7	19.1	19.3	18.9
2005	324	18.4	19.1	19.3	19.5	19.2
2006	398	18.7	19.1	19.9	19.8	19.5

Asian American

		English	Math	Reading	Science	Composite
	N	Avg	Avg	Avg	Avg	Avg
1991	229	20.4	22.2	21.3	21.0	21.3
1992	227	20.9	22.7	21.8	21.3	21.8
1993	254	20.4	22.3	21.6	21.0	21.5
1994	260	19.7	22.1	20.6	21.1	21.0
1995	267	19.9	21.7	20.6	21.2	21.0
1996	290	20.3	21.8	20.7	20.7	21.0
1997	268	20.1	21.9	20.7	21.0	21.1
1998	281	20.3	22.7	20.6	21.6	21.4
1999	285	21.0	22.6	21.0	21.2	21.6
2000	303	19.8	22.0	20.9	21.0	21.0
2001	343	20.4	22.3	20.7	21.2	21.3
2002	358	20.7	22.4	21.1	21.3	21.5
2003	339	20.8	22.7	21.5	21.8	21.8
2004	360	21.3	22.2	21.3	21.5	21.7
2005	402	21.8	22.8	22.1	22.0	22.3
2006	381	21.5	22.7	22.3	22.1	22.3

* Data provided by ACT, Inc.

Running Ahead: Kentucky's Achievement Gap

Michael Dailey, Director of Educator Quality and Diversity
Kentucky Department of Education

Differences in academic performance among special needs, low socio-economic, minority and majority groups have been defined as achievement gaps. Achievement gaps are viewed as measuring sticks to determine how successful or unsuccessful educators are at meeting the needs of all children.

The passage of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 brought to light the disparities facing the nation's children and the critical need to address performance differences. Although Kentucky has not been an exception to achievement gaps, efforts to address the needs of all children have been on the forefront since the implementation of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) in 1990.

KRS 158.649 (SB 168), Kentucky's achievement gap legislation, became effective July 15, 2002. This statute requires each school council and the superintendent to agree on biennial targets for eliminating any achievement gaps and to submit the targets to the local board for adoption. Based on the disaggregated biennial assessment results, the local board determines if each school achieved its biennial targets. If a school fails to meet its goals, the council is required to submit revisions to the school improvement plan describing use of professional



development and continuing education funds to close the achievement gap. If a school fails to meet its targets to reduce the gap in student achievement for any student group for two (2) successive biennia, the superintendent is required to report to the commissioner of education and the school's improvement plan is subject to review and approval by the department.

Kentucky's investment in education began the effort to provide equitable educational experiences for all children. The Kentucky Department of Education led this charge by establishing a mission recognizing the necessity of educating all children at the highest level. That mission led to the development of a task force consisting of teachers, principals, community members, parents and local business owners charged with the responsibility of formulating a plan

to address achievement gaps. Kentucky's former Education Commissioner Gene Wilhoit led the work, which later became the Partnership for Minority Student Achievement.

The Minority Student Achievement Task Force (MSATF) was formed in March 2000 with a charge to:

- review and analyze existing data about the performance of Kentucky students, with particular emphasis on achievement gaps between majority and minority students

- investigate promising research and practices from Kentucky and the nation

- develop a set of actions, with timelines, for improving the performance of minority students in Kentucky

The work of the task force generated extensive discussion around the barriers facing minorities, students with disabilities and children in poverty in our current educational system. In October 2000, a report submitted by the task force to the Kentucky Department of Education outlined a set of recommendations for use by local school districts in reducing the minority student achievement gap.

This work generated a pilot project between the Kentucky Department of Education and seven local districts that volunteered to take on this challenge.

The pilot ended in 2004, culminating successful work at reducing achievement gaps between minority and majority student groups. Findings from this work indicated that the efforts to reduce and eliminate achievement gaps cannot be found in a program or initiative, but rather take a systemic effort to engage all children through research-based practices, intentionally setting a climate and culture for student learning, and reflective practices and support for educators to eliminate barriers traditionally limiting opportunities for “children in the gap.”

The findings from this effort further informed the work at the Department of Education. An achievement gap cross-agency team was formed in 2004 to continue the work, informing the department and local school districts of promising practices to engage all learners in Kentucky schools. The cross-agency team conducts school visits, capturing the efforts and promising practices that have created systemic change in the achievement of all children. Because of the efforts by schools, some of the gaps are closing, and students overall are showing continuous progress. Efforts to remove barriers to learning can be found in every initiative, from preschool education to high school transformation.

Achievement Gap Coordinators (AGCs), a group under the guidance of the department, work to provide leadership to school staffs and students and improve student performance with support and assistance. Each of the five coordinators targets a

specific area of the state with school assistance programs. The coordinators’ overriding goal is to provide schools and districts with the tools to reduce achievement gaps. The AGCs have developed a statewide network to provide support and assistance to schools and districts. They serve as the department’s “eyes and ears” throughout the state, providing staff with information about what schools and districts really need to make improvements. The AGCs work closely with other department staff, especially District Support Facilitators, Highly Skilled Educators and Targeted Assistance Coaches, to design assistance programs for schools.

The group:

organizes and delivers direct support services to schools and districts in response to their needs
works with Highly Skilled Educators and the Office of Leadership and School Improvement to identify school and district needs to close gaps
networks with professional development providers
collects data from Scholastic Audits and Reviews and Guided Self Studies to pinpoint successful programs and areas of weakness
meets monthly to discuss and analyze information
delivers services to schools and districts based on individual needs

The department’s Division of Early Childhood Development focused on eliminating barriers to learning through the support

and development of early childhood centers in the 11 Special Education Cooperative Regions. Additional efforts targeted Classrooms of Excellence to serve as models of high-quality, inclusive early child hood mentoring districts, preschool academies and scholarship incentives to recruit highly qualified and effective preschool educators. The KIDS NOW Early Childhood Initiatives work to assure that all environments in which young children spend time are of the highest quality. If the environments and the adults who are in those environments are knowledgeable and responsive, then the achievement gap will begin to close.”

The Office of Teaching and Learning addresses literacy as one of the most critical barriers in student learning. Reading is the foundation of knowledge acquisition, providing children with the essentials to engage any learning experience. Reading First is a federally funded program to assist states in building comprehensive reading programs in grades K-3, with an emphasis on providing research-based reading instruction, including supplemental and intervention services for students in the achievement gap. Kentucky provides support using Reading First funds in a variety of ways for all Kentucky schools. Seventy-four elementary schools are participating in the program directly, using highly effective professional development, Tier Three Model for Reading Instruction, instructional coaching and individualized assistance in

reading plan development. The expansion of these services also was offered through state Read to Achieve grants.

The quality of instruction is essential to removing barriers and providing equitable education experiences for all children. Other programs and initiatives address mathematics, science and world languages, and spe-

cial education collaboration continues to enhance opportunities for all students. The results of these initiatives cannot be realized without a strong commitment from local districts and schools. As indicated earlier, efforts to close gaps begin with all stakeholders. The Kentucky Department of Education is committed to assist and support local districts' efforts to provide

the best educational experience for all children.

As educators we must face and accept the simple but realistic fact that our practice dictates outcome. We must no longer dwell in the pit of excuses, the presentation of myths or "can't do attitudes" toward the education of all children. Each one of us has an important role to play

References

Division of Early Childhood Development, KDE. (2006). *Division of early childhood development: Efforts to close achievement gaps*.

Division of Instructional Equity, KDE. (2004). Partnership for minority student achievement. Retrieved December 14, 2006, from <http://www.education.ky.gov/KDE/Instructional+Resources/>

Closing+the+Gap/Equity/

Office of Teaching and Learning, KDE. (2006). *Initiatives from office of teaching and learning related to the achievement gap*.

LINKS & RESOURCES

Click on the links below for more information.

Education Trust*

<http://www.edtrust.org>

Teaching for High Standards*

<http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/negp/Reports/highstds.htm>

Closing the Achievement Gap

<http://www.subnet.nga.org/educlear/achievement/>

Kentucky Department of Education

<http://www.education.ky.gov>

Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education

<http://cpe.ky.gov/>

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory

<http://www.ncrel.org/gap/studies/thetop.htm>

U.S. Department of Education

<http://www.ed.gov>

The Institute for Urban and Minority Education

<http://iume.tc.columbia.edu/pathways/achieve3/academic.asp>

Closing the Achievement Gap:

Two Views from Current Research

<http://www.ericdigests.org/2004-3/gap.html>

Race and the Achievement Gap

http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/15_04/Race154.shtml

National Bureau of Economic Research:

The Achievement Gap

<http://www.nber.org/papers/W12207>

United We Stand:

Encouraging Diversity in Kentucky's Leaders

[http://www.sos.ky.gov/NR/rdonlyres/17FD277C-4FF6-487C-B426-](http://www.sos.ky.gov/NR/rdonlyres/17FD277C-4FF6-487C-B426-0438604A5458/0/UnitedWeStandFINAL.pdf)

[0438604A5458/0/UnitedWeStandFINAL.pdf](http://www.sos.ky.gov/NR/rdonlyres/17FD277C-4FF6-487C-B426-0438604A5458/0/UnitedWeStandFINAL.pdf)

Pathways & Success to Careers in Technology

http://www.kysu.edu/land_grant/pact.cfm

** Highly recommended*

FEATURED LINKS

Click the links below:

Guide to Help African-American Parents Improve Their Children's Education

This guide gives African-American parents the necessary tools needed to advocate and improve their child's education.



Guide to Help Latino Parents Improve Their Children's Education

This guide offers a number of suggestions for how Latino parents can get involved and be a better advocate for the education of Latino children.

